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DELIVERANCE

The Rise and Decline of the State

MARTIN VAN CREVELD
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1999, viii + 439 PGS.

Martin van Creveld's outstanding book traces the origin, growth, and decline of what Nietzsche termed "that coldest of all cold monsters, the state." By "state," our author means something more limited than do contemporary libertarians (and Max Weber). To the latter, the state is a person or group exercising a monopoly over coercion in a territory.

Van Creveld has something less broad in mind. "The state . . . is an *abstract* entity which can be neither seen, nor touched. The entity is not identical with either the rulers or the ruled . . . it is a corporation in the sense that it possesses a legal *persona* of its own, which means that it has rights and duties and may engage in various activities *as if* it were a real, flesh and blood, living individual. . . . Understood in this way, the state—like the corporation of which it is a subspecies—is a comparatively recent invention" (p. 1).

On the surface, this sounds like a topic of interest only to legal and political theorists: why should the rest of us care about it? As our author makes clear, the rise of the state in his sense has had disastrous consequences for human life and liberty. Any effective movement for a free society must fully understand this enemy.

Before the seventeenth century, political rule was personal. The Greek city-states and the Roman Republic most closely approached the modern distinction between public and private affairs; but even here, e.g.,

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"in Rome and possibly elsewhere, each time a levy [for troops] was held the men had to be sworn in afresh—not to the Republic, it should be noted, but to the person of the commanding consul" (p. 30).

One might at first sight think the various systems of personal rule disastrous for individual liberty and welcome their demise. If personal rule "neither was able, or indeed attempted, to guarantee the security of either the life or the property of individuals" (p. 54) should we not welcome the state?

Personal rule was far from ideal, since people found themselves totally at the mercy of the rulers. Two illustrations, taken from the end of the pre-state period, show how rulers viewed their subjects. "The frequent comparison [between subjects] . . . and a flock of sheep—owned as the latter are by their shepherd and raised for his benefit—speaks for itself. It was only after ascending the throne in 1660 that Louis XIV arrived at the point where he could distinguish between his own glory and the good of the *état* that he headed" (p. 127). I should myself be inclined to a more nuanced view of Louis XIV—by the end of his reign Louis doubted whether he had the right to impose new taxes. But van Creveld's main point cannot be challenged: in some sense, subjects belonged to the King. (Incidentally, Louis XIV ascended the throne in 1643, not 1660.)

As one might expect under a proprietary notion of rule, warfare also bore a strongly personal character. "Rulers such as Charles V, Francis I, and their contemporaries fought each other to determine who would rule this province or that. The personal nature of their quarrels is indicated by the fact that the Emperor repeatedly offered to fight his rival in a duel" (p. 159).

Surely, one might think, nothing could be so bad as personal rule of this sort. And yet in medieval and early modern Europe, more scope for individual freedom than in modern times existed. The power of a monarch to dominate his subjects met checks from every side. Local lords, independent or semi-independent towns, the Emperor, and the Church could be played off against the king, and against one another, to give the subject refuge from oppression. Further, premodern rulers lacked the skill of their latter-day successors to extract resources from their subjects. Governmental inefficiency is all to the good, so far as the cause of liberty is concerned.

Our author contends that a twofold process disrupted the premodern conception of rule. First, the notion of the state as an abstract entity apart from the ruler developed. According to the leading theorist of the new notion, Thomas

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Hobbes, the state's law knew no bounds: it need recognize no competing source of authority, whether Church or Emperor.

"Hobbes deserves the credit," van Creveld remarks, "for inventing the 'state' . . . as an abstract entity separate both from the sovereign (who is said to 'carry' it) and the ruled, who, by means of a contract among themselves, transferred their rights to him. . . . Bound by no law except that which he himself laid down (and which, of course, he could change at any moment), Hobbes's sovereign was much more powerful than . . . any Western ruler since late antiquity" (p. 179). Incidentally, our author sees Machiavelli as a premodern figure, not the herald of a new age. He still occupied himself with the personal.

We have an abstract entity, staffed by a professional bureaucracy, to which all citizens in a nation had to give themselves without limit.

As the new notion of state and sovereignty took hold, the importance of the ruler as a person declined. Sometimes, as with Louis XV, the King took little part in affairs of state. He spent "almost half of his time hunting and the rest with Madame de Pompadour" (p. 138). Even a monarch who took a very active role in government, Frederick II of Prussia, described himself in 1756 as "the first servant of the state" (p. 137).

Once more, though, the question arises, what is so bad about regarding the state as an abstract entity? To grasp van Creveld's answer, one must consider the second part of the twofold process he describes. In the early modern period "the relationship between . . . the state and its citizens was based not on sentiment but on reason and interest" (p. 190). Under this conception, a citizen would meet undue demands with reluctance or outright resistance.

If, however, emotion could be mobilized for the new abstract entity, what our author calls a "Great Transformation" was in the offing. Jean Jacques Rousseau acted as the prime theorist of the new order. In his view, everyone must be subordinated to the "general will" which embodied one's *patrie* or community. "Patriotism—the active submission to, and participation in, the general will—becomes the highest of all virtues and the source of all the remaining ones" (p. 192).

With Rousseau, though, we have not yet reached the modern state in its culminating form. He took the *patrie* to be local: but when, after the French Revolution, various writers identified the general will with the nation, the process that led to disaster was complete.

How so? Let us see what we have amassed. We have an abstract entity, staffed by a professional bureaucracy,

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to which all citizens in a nation had to give themselves without limit. And what was the purpose of the new entity? War, fought with unprecedented manpower and armaments and without restraint.

To accomplish its purpose, the state gradually seized total control of the monetary system. (Van Creveld is, with Murray Rothbard, one of the few historians who sees the centrality of this control.) In the book's central passage, our author notes that the "states having finally succeeded in their drive to conquer money, the effect of absolute economic dominance on the states themselves was to allow them to fight each other on a scale and with a ferocity never equalized before or since. . . . The concentration of all economic power in the hands of the state would not have been necessary, nor could it have been justified, if its overriding purpose had not been to impose order on the one hand and fight its neighbors on the other" (pp. 241–42).

A seemingly recondite concept, the state as an abstract entity took on bodily form and was revealed, in the world wars of the twentieth century, to be an all-devouring monster. Of course, the blessings of the new order had to be spread beyond Europe. Most of Asia, Africa, and Latin America proved no match in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the newly armed Leviathans, and van Creveld tells the story of imperialism in a grisly chapter. In the book's best-written passage, our author remarks that the imperial "system was cheap to run, the number of white administrators usually being only one per 70,000–100,000 natives; as Winston Churchill . . . might have said, never did so few keep down so many with the aid of so little" (p. 319).

Are we doomed to sacrifice our lives to these Moloch states until civilization is destroyed? Van Creveld thinks not: he maintains that the state has now entered a period of decline. The horrors of full-scale nuclear war have deterred states from total conflict; and, with the demise of massive wars, the state has lost its *raison d'être*. Further, financial exigencies have almost everywhere mandated cutbacks in the welfare programs.

With the demise of massive wars, the state has lost its *raison d'être*.

Our author, surprisingly, does not view the collapse of the state as altogether desirable. He writes that "on balance, the dangers and the opportunities are probably about equal. Neither is the retreat of the state to be regretted, nor will tomorrow's world be either much better or much worse than the one which is even now fading into the shadows" (p. 421). Most readers, I suspect, will think our deliverance from the cancer of the state, if indeed van Creveld is right about this, grounds for rejoicing.

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Mr. van Creveld's book displays great learning over many fields besides the author's specialty of military history. I note a few questionable points: It is certainly false that in Christianity, "God, after all, is believed to possess no fewer than three different bodies" (p. 178). The *pontifex maximus* was not always the chief authority over Roman religion (p. 27). In the United Provinces, there was no single position of *Stadhouder*. The office was provincial, but the House of Orange took them all over (p. 116). ✦

New Light on Socialism

Power and Prosperity: Outgrowing Communist and Capitalist Dictatorships

Mancur Olson
Basic Books, 2000, xxviix + 233 pgs.

Mancur Olson's new book resolves for me a major mystery. As all readers of *The Mises Review* know, socialism is an unworkable system. Mises conclusively demonstrated that a centrally planned economy cannot calculate rationally; and the collapse of communism in 1989–1991 enabled even the invincibly ignorant, such as Robert Heilbroner, to grasp Mises's point.

But if socialism cannot calculate, why did it take so long to collapse? Part of the answer is easy to understand. The Soviets had the help of the capitalist market in setting their prices; they did not abolish free enterprise altogether; and they received vast sums in aid from the West. Indeed, Anthony Sutton has made a strong case that

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much "Soviet" industry was directly imported from abroad.

Nevertheless, a question remains. Whatever external aid it may have received, the Soviet socialist economy was manifestly inefficient. And yet, under Stalin the Soviets built up a substantial industrial base. Further, they raised and supplied an army that, albeit with a great deal of lend-lease aid from the United States, held off and then defeated the German Army during World War II. How did the Soviets achieve such feats, when one might reasonably have thought that they could at best limp along for a few years?

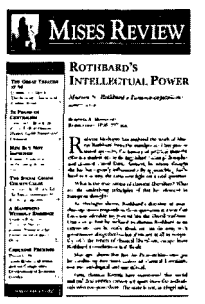
Olson has given us much of the answer: Stalin developed an ingenious system of wages and taxation, which turned the bulk of the Soviet population into hardworking slave laborers. In essence, everyone had to work for a subsistence wage, during his or her primary hours of labor. Everything that one produced above subsistence went to the state, for "investment" as it saw fit. Much of this investment, of course, took place in armaments.

So far, though, we have mere garden variety tyranny. Stalin's masterstroke was to allow, with unparalleled generosity, workers to labor overtime and keep most of what they earned for themselves. The chance to earn even small increases over basic subsistence set the skilled avidly to work.

As Mr. Olson explains the point: "All that is needed is to set the base or inframarginal wage of the jobs that require more ability at almost the same levels as those of unskilled workers. A far higher implicit tax rate is put on the more able people in the more productive roles. Only the tiniest premiums, if any, are needed to provide an incentive for the more able people to accept the jobs that require higher ability, because the system of placing little or no tax on marginal or 'bonus' income means that the more productive are able to keep most of their higher output for extra work" (p. 120).

Stalin had other "brutal and cunning innovations" (p. 129) as well: those interested in details must consult the book. Combined with the tax exploitation scheme just explained, the military and industrial prowess of Soviet Russia becomes much less mysterious.

But of course the calculation argument tells us that the Soviet system was eventually doomed. Olson does not appear aware of the Misesian version of the argument: his own account of Soviet decline stresses difficulties in gathering information and bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption. His points are valid so far as they go,



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but Austrians cannot help thinking that Mr. Olson has here missed the central point.

Paradoxically, though, our author's avoidance of Austrian economics in one respect enhances the value of his contribution. He often arrives at Austrian, or near-Austrian insights through his own arguments: in doing so, he casts unexpected light on standard points.

The author often arrives at Austrian, or near-Austrian insights through his own arguments.

All Austrians, and most non-Austrians, for example, realize the futility of price control. Prices set below the market rate will result in shortages; minimum prices, by contrast, generate surpluses. In the most familiar instance of the latter phenomenon, minimum wage rates cause unemployment.

So far, so familiar. Olson points out that because price controls prevent people from making the exchanges they desire, an incentive toward corruption arises. Under a maximum price, it will "be the case that there can be a mutually advantageous trade—one with both a buyer and a seller gaining—at a price that is higher than the controlled price and lower than the market clearing price. Both parties gain by violating the law and . . . neither has an incentive to report the offense. Essentially all of the private-sector incentive is to undermine the law. Of course, the same thing holds true if the government sets a price above market clearing levels" (p. 106).

If some people wish to violate the law, room is created for bribery, so long as the prospective gains from trade are substantial enough. "When caught in violation of the rule, those on both sides of the market have the same incentive to persuade or bribe the officials not to enforce the law. Sooner or later, the government becomes corrupt and ineffective" (p. 107).

Mr. Olson here offers a very useful, and so far as I am aware original, supplement to the Austrian analysis of interventionism. And this is not the only area in which Olson, going his own way, arrives at views of great value to Austrians.

One of the most interesting of these is Olson's assault on a key tenet of the Chicago luminaries George Stigler and Gary Becker. Actors on the market aim to benefit themselves: all and only those exchanges tend to be made that both parties find beneficial. The Chicagoites perversely apply this point to government. Will not government programs also be the most efficient possible?

The complex logic by which Becker justifies his roseate view of government is best left to those interested in such things. Our author readily locates the

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fallacy in the "whatever is, is optimal" school. His way of putting the point sounds as if it had come from Murray Rothbard. "When we drop the assumption that all interactions are voluntary, the implication that social outcomes are necessarily efficient disappears. The party with power gains from threatening to use or using the power . . . the thief need not care whether a fence would pay him as much for what he is taking as it is worth to the victim . . . Similarly, there is nothing that ensures that a government will necessarily confiscate the property of its subjects only when the government can use this property more efficiently than its previous owners could" (p. 61).

Here precisely is Rothbard's central criticism of the Public Choice School. Governmental action cannot be equated to the enforcement of voluntary contracts: those who think otherwise, such as James Buchanan, foolishly take the myth of the social compact literally. Both the Public Choice School and Becker and Company fail to grasp that force is the essence of the state.

Mr. Olson shies away from libertarianism: the very mention of laissez-faire makes him recoil. What of public goods? Is not governmental action to produce them necessary? I do not propose to analyze Olson's case here: rather I shall confine myself to one simple observation. Suppose that Olson is entirely right: the free market cannot generate an optimal supply of public goods. (Sound Rothbardian that I am, I of course reject the entire line of reasoning that leads to this conclusion.) Given the coercive essence of the state, so much stressed by Olson himself, is it not the path of wisdom to abandon altogether tinkering with the market in order to arrive at a chimerical optimal provision of public goods?

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But I prefer not to stress Olson's deviation from Austrian orthodoxy. Rather, much more significant is that he meets Austrians most of the way on the most vital contemporary economic issue. He fully recognizes that the key to prosperity lies in secure individual property rights. Except for "on-the-spot" trades, exchanges cannot take place unless individuals have clear and enforceable titles to property. Why make a bargain that involves future performance if you cannot rely on the other party to honor a contract?

Olson parts company with those in the Rothbardian tradition in thinking that governmental action is needed to secure this key to prosperity. (Once again, a "public good" is involved.) But

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is it not remarkable how far this eminent political economist travels with Rothbard? ✦

The Limits of Public Choice

Public Finance and Public Choice—Two Contrasting Visions of the State

James M. Buchanan and
Richard D. Musgrave
MIT Press, 1999, ix + 272 pgs.

In March, 1998, a series of public discussions between James Buchanan and Richard Musgrave took place at the University of Munich; these along with questions from the audience and an Introduction and Conclusion by Hans-Werner Sinn, are transcribed in this valuable book.

I found by far the most enlightening aspect of the discussion the portrait of Richard Musgrave. Now approaching ninety, he is the "grand old man" of public finance and was vastly influential during the New Frontier and Great Society, of blessed memory. He embraces nearly every statist fallacy in existence to a point approaching self-parody.

Both of our authors display the expected concern with "public goods" which, it is alleged, the unhampered market cannot optimally supply. Musgrave happily quotes David Hume as a precursor of this doctrine. But faced with Hume's suspicion of government, Musgrave is much less appreciative: "I do not join Hume's proposition that in viewing government 'everyone ought to be considered a knave' . . . I would rather draw on people's capacity to serve as responsible members of the community, so that government may do its important tasks and do them well" (p. 82).

Professor Musgrave's faith in governmental beneficence, though initially startling, readily falls into place if one reviews his life. As Hans-Werner Sinn notes: "Musgrave has a social democratic background. He . . . has grown out of the German public finance tradition. His thoughts can be traced back, and often developed in opposition, to public finance economists like Schäffle, Sax, and, in particular, Adolph Wagner, one of the *Kathedersozialists* [sic] . . . A consistently favorable view of the beneficial

Mr. Musgrave embraces nearly every statist fallacy in existence to a point approaching self-parody.

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functions of the government sector has characterized Musgrave's work throughout his life" (p. 6).

Readers who recall Mises's withering scorn in *Omnipotent Government* for Wagner's statism and militarism, characteristic of the Socialists of the Chair in Wilhelmine Germany, will view Sinn's characterization of Musgrave with foreboding. Nor can one take solace in the hint that Musgrave's opinions in part developed in opposition to Wagner.

It quickly becomes apparent that in the crucial respect, Musgrave is the perfect Wagnerite. Explaining his beneficent view of government, he rejects the theory that the malignant growth of the public sector during the twentieth century stems from "a self-aggrandizing Leviathan. Budget growth, or much of it, is seen in pathological terms, reflecting the fallacies of majority voting, the usurpation of power by self-serving politicians and bureaucrats, and fiscal illusion. I am skeptical of that model" (pp. 64–65).

Quite the contrary, Musgrave tells us, the budget can easily be too small. Government spending is good for you! In support, Musgrave appeals to—you guessed it—the renowned Socialist of the Chair Adolph Wagner. The share of GNP going to the public sector in the industrialized countries of the West now ranges from 30 to 60 percent, a vast increase from the situation at the beginning of the twentieth century. The growth, Musgrave alleges, can be explained by Wagner's law of public expenditure growth. The law is "traceable to major factors: structural changes in the economy, democratization of society, and an increased concern for social justice" (p. 64).

One might at first suppose that Musgrave could be readily refuted. No fancy theories need be adduced: one has only to glance at the record of the dismal twentieth century, with all its appalling wars and massacres. Given the manifest invidious consequences of the modern state, how can our Harvard eminence be so blind? Can any reasonable person, faced with the historical record, think government a beneficent force?

Given the manifest invidious consequences of the modern state, how can our Harvard eminence be so blind?

Musgrave's response is for me the highlight of the book: "The twentieth century has been marked by two terrible wars, made more deadly than those of the past by the advancing technology of destruction . . . It is true that there have been unthinkable episodes of brutality, such as the Stalinist terror and the Holocaust. But many of these terrible events occurred during the first half of the century, and I would suggest that the second half has been a success" (p. 227). How unfortunate that the victims of Mao's massacres in

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China, or Pol Pot in Cambodia, are not able to learn these glad tidings.

The man is really unbelievable. He simply cannot grasp why anyone would wish to restrict the state. In one discussion session, William Niskanen asked him, "What type of institutional arrangements do we need to assure time consistency? . . . How do we prevent each generation from treating the future as a commons?" (p. 235).

I should have thought obvious the purport of Niskanen's incisive question. How do we limit the government so that it will not leave future generations with a crushing burden of debt? How do we prevent inflationary booms that have later disastrous consequences? Would not these, and similar issues, leap to one's mind in assessing Niskanen's comment?

Musgrave actually takes the question to indicate the need for greater governmental activity. "I agree [!] that equity across generations is not something that the market can handle, so government is needed" (p. 235). He calls for a properly funded Social Security system, to make sure that the benefits of future retirees do not fall. The burden of the taxes required to pay for these benefits goes unmentioned.

But I have laughed at Musgrave enough: it is time to get down to arguments. He maintains that the government must decide questions of distribution by computing the "social welfare function." That is to say, we must compare the gains and losses to particular people from proposed schemes of redistributive taxation.

But hold on a moment. Has not the social welfare function long since been cast out of economic theory? Did not Arrow's Impossibility Theorem kill it? Yes, our author admits, if you mean "a Bergson–Samuelson social welfare function, [which] requires interpersonal and cardinal utility comparison" (p. 45), then the social welfare function has not been successfully derived.

This by no means settles the matter, our author avers. Why not use a social contract to determine the function? Musgrave regrettably does not explain his favored procedure in detail, but he

I have laughed at Musgrave enough: it is time to get down to arguments.

does sketch out its main features. Each person has equal worth: thus, individuals "start out with equal inputs and equal voice into what is to be considered fair in society" (p. 56).

What results from these deliberations? Musgrave supports a combined principle of fairness. Like Rawls, he inclines to think that "inequality is fair only where it is to the benefit of everyone" (p. 86). This however must be

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modified by Lockean rights of entitlement, to which he would give "one-quarter weight with three-quarters of the Rawlsian concept" (p. 56). (Incidentally, this does not mean that people may hold one-quarter of their income exempt from confiscation. Rather, it requires only that the government give entitlements some weight in its deliberations.)

Whether Musgrave deserves his reputation in public finance is not for me to judge: what I can say is that as philosophy, his remarks are incompetent nonsense. For one thing, there appears no connection between his starting point and his conclusion. He begins with people who, it is alleged, have an equal voice in determining the principles of justice. How does he know that people under conditions of equal voice will arrive at his peculiar formula—take ¾ Rawls, ¼ Nozick, mix, and serve? He does not tell us.

How does he know that people under conditions of equal voice will arrive at his peculiar formula—take ¾ Rawls, ¼ Nozick, mix, and serve?

However one may deplore Rawls's difference principle, one must at least give its distinguished author credit: he gives reasons for the principles of justice he advocates. Musgrave, in one of his best insights, rejects Rawls's argument: "Reasoning in terms of risk aversion (the basis for Rawls's derivation of the difference principle) is attractive to the economist's penchant for maximization but I question its usefulness as a principle of justice" (p. 46). But he puts nothing in its place.

Readers will have noticed a glaring omission in my review. I have so far said nothing about Musgrave's antagonist, James Buchanan. This failure is not one of my ever-increasing fits of absentmindedness. Buchanan confines himself to reiteration of his well-known views, and breaks no new ground.

It would be uncharacteristic of me to let an author off scot free, so I shall conclude with a few critical remarks about Buchanan. In his pursuit of the mirage of "pure procedural justice," the view that justice consists entirely of rules of decision, Buchanan accomplishes an amazing feat. In one place, he is less in favor of property rights than Musgrave. "I [Buchanan] don't buy at all into Nozick-type entitlement claims" (p. 85).

Further, he essays no reply to Musgrave's criticism of his social contract approach: "Why should self-interested individuals, when knowing of their superiority, agree to an impartial choice, even though still in a Hobbesian setting they could secure a better bargain?" (p. 45–46). But Buchanan's contractarianism, whatever its failings, is at least better than Musgrave's rehash of tired social-democratic clichés. ✦

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An Intrinsic Right

Property and Freedom

Richard Pipes
Alfred A. Knopf, 1999
xvi + 328 pgs.

Mr. Pipes has written a very good book, but he has made life difficult for me as a reviewer. He defends the importance of property rights throughout the book, but he does not argue systematically, in the style of his Harvard colleagues John Rawls and Robert Nozick. Rather, he presents a host of observations about property, putting to excellent use his wide erudition. How these observations fit together to make a coherent case is a question he leaves to the reader.

I propose to do so as well and will here confine myself to calling attention to a few of the book's insights. Mr. Pipes maintains, first, that the instinct to acquire property is natural to human beings. Societies that attempt radically to restrict the acquisition of property, or to do away with individual property altogether, are liable to destroy freedom. A regime that defies human nature is on the road to tyranny.

But why believe that property is natural to humans? Mr. Pipes adduces convincing evidence from child psychology. "Studies of child development have made it possible to chart the evolution of acquisitive impulses. Two psychologists have observed something parents are well aware of; namely that infants of eighteen months have difficulty falling asleep without a special toy, blanket, or other familiar object, and are clearly aware what belongs to whom . . . As they grow older, children learn to share, but the spirit of ownership remains strong, as does the desire to accumulate" (p. 73).

A regime that defies human nature is on the road to tyranny.

"If socialism goes against human nature, we will change human nature!" So an old Marxist slogan boasts. Perhaps the desire of children for property can be overcome with the proper socialist upbringing. The results of such experiments hardly encourage

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imitation: "Bruno Bettelheim learned to his surprise that while it was possible, over time, to inculcate in kibbutz children indifference to private belongings, this exacted a heavy price. Israelis brought up in such a Spartan environment . . . experienced great difficulty forming an emotional commitment to any one individual, whether by forming a friendship or falling in love" (p. 75).

The wish to hold property, then, our author has persuasively shown intrinsic to our nature: interfere with it at your peril. (Pipes endeavors to support his conclusion further by appeal to studies of territoriality among animals. These I confess to finding less persuasive: except on controversial and speculative assumptions, they are not relevant to humans.) And the importance of property for the human personality is not, for Pipes, a mere matter of empirical psychology. Philosophers have argued to the same conclusion.

Pipes enlists in his support the surprising figure of Hegel, hardly a devout libertarian: "Hegel already stressed the positive psychological effects of ownership . . . 'It is only through owning and controlling property that he [man] can embody his will in external objects and begin to transcend the subjectivity of his own immediate existence'" (p. 72, quoting Hegel). Less opaquely, William James maintained that we consider what we own to be part of ourselves; "We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves" (p. 72).

James here lends support to a Lockean-style argument for the right to own property. If I own myself, and external objects that I acquire in the "right" way become part of myself, do I not own them as well?

Surprisingly, our author declines to follow this path. He distrusts metaphysical arguments. After a brief summary of Locke's theory, he remarks: "Attractive and self-evident as it may appear, the labor theory of property is a two-edged sword, for it can also be used to assail property. How is one to justify inherited wealth which requires no personal effort, or the fact that farm laborers and factory workers do not own what they produce?" (p. 36).

Pipes's objections to the Lockean account strike me as weak. Inherited wealth stems from the right of bequest, and workers do not own what they produce because they have contracted to use property belonging to others in return for wages. What could be simpler? Nor is Proudhon's point against property, which our author mentions with sympathy, of any greater weight. Proudhon asked, what are latecomers

The importance of property for the human personality is not, for Pipes, a mere matter of empirical psychology.

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to do, if all landed property has been appropriated? Why is it unfair if they must for a time labor for others, until they can afford to buy property from its current possessors?

But I must not be unjust to Mr. Pipes. His specialty is history, not political philosophy; and his historical observations often display penetrating intelligence. He stresses, e.g., an idea crucial to the recognition of individual property rights in Europe: Even under absolute monarchy, the ruler was expected to support himself from his own domain.

Our author finds this idea clearly expressed by Jean Bodin, often considered a leading proponent of unlimited rule. True enough, Bodin extolled in extravagant terms the prerogatives of sovereignty; but these did not include the power to impose new taxes. Natural law forbade this.

Pipes's summary of Bodin's views is excellent: "The foundation of the state is the property-owning household. The authority of the sovereign stops at the boundary of the household: *imperium* or *potestas* is never to be confused with *dominium* or *proprietas*. Bodin cites Seneca to the effect that 'to Kings appertains the power over all, but property belongs to individuals'" (p. 28).

I fear that I have so far given a misleading impression of *Property and Freedom*. It does not consist entirely of disjointed observations about property. Two of the chapters, taken together, approach a central thesis.

Mr. Pipes contrasts the systems of property rights in Britain and Russia; each had very different consequences for liberty. Pipes's chapter on Russia grows out of his long and distinguished career as a specialist in the modern history of that country.

As he sees matters, Russia was a patrimonial state in which all property was owned by the Tsar. His subjects, accordingly, lived by his sufferance. Even the highest nobles were in effect the slaves of their sovereign, utterly dependent on his will. Our author paints in bold strokes, and some may consider his account one-dimensional. Indeed, in other works, Mr. Pipes has stressed the continuity between patrimonial Tsarist Russia and Communist Russia, a thesis that aroused the ire of the famed mathematician Igor Shafarevich. But Pipes makes a strong case that the lack of personal and professional freedom throughout Russian history has stemmed from the absence of strong individual property rights.

Our author paints in bold strokes, and some may consider his account one-dimensional.

Why did the patrimonial system develop? Mr. Pipes ascribes part of the responsibility to the "surfeit of land in

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Russia prior to the nineteenth century" (p. 161). Because land was available in abundance, people felt little need to work out fixed rules for delimiting separate spheres of influence over land. Incidentally, Professor John Nye takes Pipes to task for not citing the work of Ester Broserup in this connection (*Reason*, March, 2000, p. 69). But this criticism is incorrect: Pipes does cite Broserup (p. 42).

In contrast to Russia, Britain is Pipes's success story, and he carefully traces the resistance to royal attempts to impose new taxes. The attempts by Charles I to tax at will led to resistance, culminating in civil war and the king's execution in 1649. His successors had to recognize that taxes could be imposed only with parliamentary consent.

I cannot see why Pipes so insistently praises the importance of this development. No doubt he is right that if a king loses the power to tax as he pleases, this is all to the good. But what is so wonderful about taxes imposed by a parliament?

Mr. Pipes writes not simply as a chronicler of the past, but also as a concerned citizen. He neatly identifies the fallacy in "social rights": "The so-called 'social rights' of today are not 'rights' and certainly not 'entitlements,' since no one is entitled to anything at someone else's expense. They are rather claims on society which it may or may not grant" (p. 289). It is not every day that a Harvard professor advances such an opinion; moreover, he cites Ayn Rand in support of it. ✦

Beauty By Contract

Hard Green: Saving the Environment from the Environmentalists. A Conservative Manifesto.

Peter Huber
Basic Books, 1999, xxxi + 223 pgs.

Peter Huber's valuable book relies in part on a questionable premise, but this very dependence makes possible its key contribution. Like the Soft Greens whom it is his principal aim to combat, Mr. Huber believes that the government must defend the environment by restricting freedom. But, he maintains, Soft Greens such as Paul Ehrlich and Al Gore go about the necessary task in the wrong way.

Mr. Huber believes that the government must defend the environment by restricting freedom.

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Against these modern worthies, Mr. Huber avows himself a disciple of Teddy Roosevelt. Nature, untouched by human hands, is a Good Thing. Accordingly, both he and Roosevelt hold, it must be preserved. The value of untouched nature, one gathers, is largely aesthetic. It is not the sort of thing that you can defend through argument; rather, our author aims to evoke feelings of the required kind in his readers.

Not trusting altogether to his unaided ability to do so, he cites at some length the purple prose of his mentor: "There are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness . . . when the wanderer sees the awful glory of sunrise and sunset in the wide waste spaces of the earth, unworn of man, and changed only by the slow change of the ages through time everlasting" (frontispiece, unnumbered). Your aesthetic sensibilities suitably aroused by these winged words, you will no doubt agree with Mr. Huber that the government must act. Vast spaces must be sequestered by the state, lest the forces of free enterprise spoil the wilderness by violating it—or, what is worse, developing it.

But is the case of Roosevelt and Huber altogether conclusive? I cannot think so. For one thing, why do aesthetic values suffice to justify coercion by the state? If you own a Rembrandt or a Rubens, may the state take it from you should you lock your painting away in a closet rather than expose it to the eyes of the multitude? If not, why may your wetland (formally swamp) be expropriated because you wish to drain it and develop it? Is it enough to defend expropriation to say, as Mr. Huber does, that many people share his aesthetic tastes?

Further, let us for the moment accept the aesthetic justification for intervention that our author offers.

Vast spaces must be sequestered by the state, lest the forces of free enterprise spoil the wilderness by violating it—or what is worse, developing it.

What about the aesthetic values manifested in industrial development? Must these not be set against the "hidden spirit of the wilderness" so beloved of Theodore Roosevelt? Could not someone match Huber's passage from Roosevelt with an equally mawkish tribute to the skyscraper by Ayn Rand? Exactly what wilderness-preserving intervention does an aesthetic politics justify? Huber does not tell us.

We can, though, leave the aesthetic entirely in the hands of our author yet still recognize that his case for state intervention fails. Why cannot those who share Mr. Huber's delight in conservation buy land in order to keep it

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free from developers? Our author himself concedes some weight to this point: "All in all, private conservation is, by a wide margin, the most important form of conservation we have. A great deal of conservation occurs on entirely private ranches and estates, private lands, shores, and lakes. Private land trusts are by far the most important and fast growing factor in the conservation movement today, particularly in the West and Southwest" (p. 91).

Why, then, should conservationists rally to the state? Even if you share Mr. Huber's aesthetic views, why not allow the free market to achieve conservationist aims without coercive intervention? Surely state intervention is not an end in itself, and, in his criticism of the Soft Greens, our author shows himself aware of the evils of which the state is capable. Why play with fire if you can avoid it?

Alas, the free market is not good enough for Mr. Huber. Although "Hard Greens will never call for federal management where private, local, or state initiative will do . . . an incontrovertible fact remains. Some things depend on doing things on a scope and scale that is inescapably public" (p. 91).

In sum, those who support conservation will, under a free market, succeed in withdrawing land from development. Their preferences, if backed by money, count in the market just as much as those of avid developers do. But the conservation they secure does not meet the wishes of Mr. Huber, let alone Theodore Roosevelt. Only the state can save us.

Our author's willingness to use the state extends far and wide. Thus, he praises President Clinton for designating "as a national monument a vast stretch of land in Utah...It was a controversial call: The area includes the Kaiparowits Plateau, where a Dutch-owned concern was slated to begin mining massive coal formations. Roosevelt would have understood the controversy . . . and approved, not just the decision to conserve, but the in-your-face political courage it required" (p. xxvii).

Alas, the free market is not good enough for Mr. Huber.

Our author must here resolve a difficulty. He acknowledges, nay stresses, the inefficiency of the state. "The Softs have led us down Friedrich Hayek's 'Road to Serfdom,' from good intention to gross bureaucracy, from grand principle to raw power" (p. xxix). How then can he rely on the state to do what he and Roosevelt wish?

Yes, Mr. Huber answers, the state is inefficient: it cannot do anything right. But precisely this fact allows the state to conserve effectively. Just the point of conservation is to withdraw resources from use. The state does not have to *do* anything: by conserving, it simply prevents

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anyone from using the wilderness. And this task even an inefficient state can adequately carry out.

I cannot think Mr. Huber's transparent sophism copes with the anti-statist argument. Why does he think that the state, given the power to confiscate land for aesthetic reasons, will confine itself to the tasks our author mandates? Is not the lesson of Mises and Hayek that the state, unless rigidly restricted by fixed rules, will quickly spread its deadly inefficiencies far and wide? Our author's invocation of Theodore Roosevelt's shade seems hardly sufficient to stand in the way of a tyrannical state.

Hard Green, then, rests on what to my mind is a manifestly false premise: the need for state-mandated conservation based on aesthetic grounds. But his false premise serves Mr. Huber well. Because of it, he is able to mount a devastating criticism of the contemporary environmentalist movement.

More consistent defenders of the free market might be satisfied with a curt dismissal of environmentalism for its violation of property rights. Huber cannot adopt this strategy, since it would prove too much. It would undermine his own brand of environmentalism together with that of the Soft Greens he condemns.

Instead, he challenges contemporary environmentalists in a way reminiscent of Mises's critique of interventionism. Just as Mises says to his anti-capitalist foes, "Your schemes will not get you what you want," so does Huber confront the Soft Greens.

If you want conservation, he says, then withdraw land from use! What could be simpler? But Soft Greens neglect this direct route to their goal. Instead, they build speculative models that show how minute events might have drastic consequences. Al Gore, following the Danish physicist Per Bak, constantly appeals as an example to grains of sand that can trigger an avalanche.

Hard Green, then, rests on what to my mind is a manifestly false premise: the need for state-mandated conservation based on aesthetic grounds.

In like manner, the Soft Greens allege, small traces of pesticides can, under certain assumptions, lead to devastation of the environment. Must not the beneficent hand of the state intervene to prevent this dire outcome?

Mr. Huber thinks not. These models assume technology to be fixed; they cannot allow for innovation, of its nature unpredictable. But of course technology is not fixed. The originator of computer modeled Doomsday scenarios for the environment, Jay Forrester, "was not smart enough to model the future ingenuity of intellects like Ken Olsen, a protégé of Forrester himself. . . . Worse

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The government has no right to interfere with your use of your property because footloose speculations allege danger.

still for *Limits* modelers like Forrester, a new generation of wildly creative young Olsens, of equally unlimited talent and ingenuity, had enrolled at MIT" (p. 10).

Our author's argument is a simple one. If you want to preserve the wilderness, act directly: do not rely upon speculative models that often prove to be much ado about nothing. But I think that a Soft Green might reply to Mr. Huber as follows: "Why can't we have both your Teddy Roosevelt style conservation and the micromanagement that I favor? True, my models depend on conjecture; but so does your skepticism about them." To reply one must appeal to property rights: The government has no right to interfere with your use of your property because footloose speculations allege danger. But Mr. Huber lacks the robust notion of property rights required to mount this defense. Were he to accept strong property rights, he would also have blocked the sort of intervention he wants.

Hard Green contains many stimulating ideas, e.g., its defense of "inefficient" energy production in large plants. Further, our author turns the tables on environmentalists who cite James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. As Huber sees matter, the Gaia hypothesis "leads toward stability, not avalanche" (p. 42). The earth can usually adjust to changes of its own accord. No doubt the point holds *ad hominem* against Soft Greens who cite Lovelock; but since the Gaia hypothesis is speculative it lends little direct support to Huber's own position that micromanagement is not needed. By failing to embed his critique of the Soft Greens in the firm ground of Lovelock property rights, Huber weakens his indictment of them. ✦

SWEET RATIONALITY

Against the Idols of the Age

DAVID STOVE
EDITED BY ROGER KIMBALL
TRANSACTION, 1999, xxxii + 347 PGS.

The present anthology of David Stove articles is an excellent book throughout, but I should like first to concentrate on a few pages that make a decisive contribution to contemporary thought.

Current irrationalist modes of thought, e.g., Marxism, feminist epistemology, and deconstruction, share a common pattern. Each contends that because our thinking about the world

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is conditioned in a certain way, it does not grasp the world as it really exists.

Marxists contend that class position determines thought. Those of us so unfortunate enough as to be classed as "bourgeois" cannot be expected to grasp the intricacies of the dialectic.

The appropriate refutations of feminism and deconstruction should present readers no problem.

(Of course, the thought of proletarians and their self-proclaimed leaders is also class-determined, by this theory, but somehow the Marxists sweep this aside.) Feminists argue in a similar way, substituting "gender" for "class." And deconstructionalists go Marxists and feminists one better. They claim that language by its nature dooms everyone to paradox and contradiction.

Many readers, I am sure, already know how to refute these sophistical doctrines. Are they not all self-refuting? This we have already suggested for Marxism: if all thought is class-determined, and this fact makes thought unfit to grasp reality, is not Marxism also class-determined and unfit to give us truth? The appropriate refutations of feminism and deconstruction should present readers no problem.

The self-refutation argument suffices to clear these intellectual monstrosities from the field, but many will be left uneasy. Don't the fashionable leftist doctrines have a point? Is not our thought in large part conditioned by our background? One would not expect someone raised as a Dutch Calvinist to think the life of a Samurai warrior the supreme good.

It is Mr. Stove's inestimable merit to have discovered a simple logical fallacy at the heart of the pattern of false argument we have begun studying. Once exposed, the intellectual temptation of the pattern dissolves.

The story is best told in Mr. Stove's own words: "The members of this family [of arguments] are so very various, that it is not easy to distill a schema of which they are all instances. But it is not necessary, either, because their family resemblance is so pronounced that, once you have met one member, you will easily recognize any other. The following [is a] specimen . . . We can think of things only under the forms of our thought, so, we cannot think of things as they are in themselves" (p. 171).

Once the matter has been stated in Stove's pellucidly clear way, we can at once see the fallacy. The conclusion does not follow from the premise. Of course, we can think of things only under the forms of our own thought: this is only a pretentious way of saying that we think as we think. But from this nothing follows about whether our thought can attain truth. Stove sums up: "Only three things are essential: idealism in the conclusion, tautology in

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the premise, and pomposity throughout" (p. 172).

How does Stove's devastating point apply to the three examples we have looked at? The Marxist claim is, "Our thought is conditioned by our class position." Either this statement is a mere tautology, as Stove alleges in his pattern, in which case it is to be read, "The thought of members of our class is the thought of members of our class." In this case, nothing whatsoever follows about whether our thoughts are true. Alternatively, it is an empirical hypothesis of some unspecified kind, and once more how it proves that class-determined thought masks reality is not obvious. Readers may apply for themselves Stove's analysis to feminism and deconstruction.

I suspect that many readers will have interjected, "Aren't we libertarians? Do we not favor freedom?"

To expose as fallacious key patterns in modern thought is no small matter, but Stove's achievement does not stop here. I can best illustrate Stove's virtues by cheating a little bit. Let us consider Stove's "The Columbus Argument," which Mr. Kimball here speaks of favorably (pp. xiv, xxxi) but is available in another Stove anthology rather than the present book. Here Stove skewers the central argument of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*.

Mill supported freedom for "innovators" on the grounds that no improvements in society can arise without them. Against this, Stove maintains that new ideas are far more likely to cause harm than good: "Now human societies, at least ones as large and rich as ours, are incomparably more complex than TV sets, and in fact no one understands them well enough to repair or improve them. Whatever some people may claim, there are no society repairmen, as there are TV repairmen. So if anyone gets to try out in practice his new idea for repairing or improving our society, it is something like billions-to-one that he will actually make things worse if he changes them at all" (D. Stove, *Cricket Versus Republicanism*, Sydney, 1995, p. 60).

I suspect that many readers will have interjected, "Aren't we libertarians? Do we not favor freedom? How can Stove be praised for an argument that backs suppression?" This query misconceives what Stove has accomplished. He has poked a hole in Mill's utilitarian case for freedom to innovate. He leaves entirely untouched natural rights arguments for liberty in the style of Murray Rothbard. Like Rothbard, Stove regarded Mill as a confused thinker, often governed by emotion.

Rothbard, I suspect, would have delighted in this less than favorable passage: "Mill pleaded in *On Liberty* for the widest variety of what he chose to call "experiments in living." The

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phrase was a sickeningly dishonest attempt to capture some of the deserved prestige of science for things which had not the remotest connection with science; principally—need I say—certain sexual and domestic arrangements of a then "novel kind" (ibid., p. 61). I wish that I could write invective of this quality.

Mr. Stove has fatally wounded both contemporary relativism and John Stuart Mill. Not one to rest on his laurels, he takes on another of the supposed greats of modernity—the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn.

Who has not heard of Kuhn's catch phrase "paradigm shift?" According to Kuhn, science proceeds not by means of universally rational standards. Instead, a group of scientists who favor a new paradigm replace those entangled in the problems of the previously dominant model. Stove quickly locates the central fallacy: "Now you could . . . take all this just as an account of the history of science, and find more or less of value in it . . . but that is not at all how . . . Kuhn himself takes it. He will not talk himself, or let you talk if he can help it of *truth* in science, or . . . of falsity: he claims he cannot understand that class of talk" (p. 13).

Kuhn has thus wrongly eviscerated the normative dimension of science. From the fact, or alleged fact, that scientists have acted in a certain way, Kuhn wrongly concludes that what they do cannot be evaluated by principles of reason. Once more, our author stands firm as a champion of reason, in a way that Misesians can only applaud.

If we wish to claim that a free-market order is required by justice, surely we cannot look with favor on a theory that collapses morality into ancestral instincts.

A final example of Stove's defense of rationality must here suffice. According to sociobiologists such as E.O. Wilson, morality stems not from reason or direct perception of the good but rather from Darwinian imperatives. We help our children, e.g., because doing so helps us perpetuate our genes. Animals that practice "kin selection" win out in the struggle for survival, other things being equal, against those who do not. What we call moral behavior is what helped our prehistoric ancestors to survive and has as a result been built into us.

I venture to think that classical liberals have here a vital interest at stake. If we wish to claim that a free-market order is required by justice, surely we cannot look with favor on a theory that collapses morality into ancestral instincts.

We must once more, then, acknowledge a debt to David Stove, who subjects the sociobiological view to withering assault. As he notes, it simply does not fit the facts. By the doctrine of kin selection, people should be as ready to

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sacrifice for their brothers and sisters as for their children: both your brother and your child share half your genes. But of course people do not usually act as the theory predicts. In like manner, the theory predicts that an animal "will always sacrifice its life to save the lives of three or more conspecifics with each of whom it shares half its genes [such as its offspring or siblings]" (p. 314). This prediction fails in even more spectacular fashion than the previous example.

Surprisingly, Mr. Stove does not mention the most obvious defect of kin selection. People often prefer their wife or husband to a close relative, yet your spouse will share many fewer genes with you than relatives.

This example, though, merely serves to supplement Stove's powerful indictment. His unfailing defense of reason and his polemical skills of surpassing excellence command our respect. ✦

A Man Possessed

Philosophy and Social Hope

Richard Rorty
Penguin Books, 1999
xxxii + 288 pgs.

Richard Rorty is a man possessed. Like his grandfather, the Social Gospel theologian Walter Rauschenbusch, he knows what ails the world and how we may ascend to the secular equivalent of paradise. Unfortunately, a slight obstacle confronts our would-be saviour: his fantasies fly in the face of reality. But, he might answer, what is that to us? If the world is not as we wish, let us simply abolish the appearance–reality distinction. We have only to change our vocabulary, and all will be well.

The author knows what ails the world and how we may ascend to the secular equivalent of paradise.

The plot of what the *Communist Manifesto* calls "all hitherto existing history" is a simple one, and Mr. Rorty stands ready to let us in on the secret. A few people control the world's wealth and keep everyone else in subjection. "To say that history is 'the history of class struggle' is still true, if it is interpreted to mean that in every culture, under every form of government, and in every imaginable situation . . . the people who have got their hands on money and power will lie, cheat, and steal in order to make sure that they and their descendants monopolize both forever" (p. 206).

Is there no hope for those of us not in the power elite? Fortunately, Karl Marx, if not the Messiah himself, is at least John the Baptist. "The use of

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Marxist doctrine to raise the consciousness of workers—to make it clear to them how they are being cheated—shows Marxism at its best" (p. 206). If a nonsupernatural version of Christianity can be blended with Marxism, so much the better.

Let us, for the moment, leave aside a principal objection to Mr. Rorty's epic: his notion of history is utterly distorted. Does not civilization depend, as Mises has better than anyone else taught, on social cooperation through the free market? If Rorty dissents, must he not confront Mises's arguments? Let us, I repeat, put aside for the moment those questions: we shall see later how our author deals with truth.

Very well, then. We take as given Rorty's fantasies about history. Would he still not confront a difficulty? Why should we think that Rorty's "democratic socialism" offers any improvement over present conditions? Surely, one hopes, not even Rorty can be unaware of socialism's dismal record during the twentieth century. Perhaps it is asking too much to expect Rorty to know Mises, but can he have escaped hearing of the collapse of communism?

For once, our author's historical naiveté has some limits. He readily acknowledges that socialism has failed. "Just about the only constructive suggestion Marx made, the abolition of private property, has been tried. It did not work" (p. 214).

Here, I am afraid, readers may underestimate Mr. Rorty's ingenuity. He favors arousing the working class through Marxist propaganda, while at the same time he abandons Marxism. Has he not painted himself into a corner?

Not at all! So trivial a matter as an apparent contradiction is child's play to Rorty's mighty mind. He escapes his predicament by redefining socialism:

Does not civilization depend on social cooperation through the free market?

in his view, it need not involve a centrally-planned economy at all. Instead, it consists of efforts to achieve "humanistic values." Even Marx's analysis of capitalism can be jettisoned: Keynes will do just as well, if not better, to analyze the antagonistic class relations of modern society.

But, you might object, far from dissolving the apparent contradiction, Rorty has only worsened his trouble. If he abandons both Marx's analysis of capitalism and his prescription for its evils, does it not become all the more strange that Rorty wants the proletariat to rally round Marx?

Here at last the solution comes to light. What interests Rorty is not the truth or falsity of Marxism. Instead, Marxism is valuable because it arouses workers' hatred of the rich. "So now it is hard to find what Derrida calls a 'political imperative' in Marx—an imperative more specific or more novel

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than the old, old injunction to prevent the rich from continuing to steal from the poor" (p. 214). Marx, Keynes, liberation theology, it does not matter: whatever it takes to bring down the world will win Rorty's approval.

Rorty pictures history as a struggle between the rich and the poor. On this basis, he finds useful any doctrine—true or false—which arouses the workers to fury at their chains. But must he not now respond to the query: is this account of society true?

Indeed he must: but I propose one last time to postpone consideration of his response, as it is best approached indirectly. Suppose one gives Rorty not only his picture of history, but also turns a blind eye to his admission that Marxism has no remedy for the alleged ills of capitalism. Would Rorty still not find himself in a quandary?

The difficulty he faces is this: if history were a struggle between the rich and the poor, why would Rorty join the impoverished many? Is he not one of the rich and privileged himself? If it is replied that morality requires this, we face yet more questions: What is the basis of morality? Given an adequate foundation for morality, can Rorty's call for class war be supported?

Now at last we are in a good position to grasp Rorty's nihilism. Morality is not a matter of rational principles. Quite the contrary, it simply expresses what "we" want. The fact that a group of leftist intellectuals take capitalism to be unjust is all the "justification" we need. In morality there is no distinction between appearance and reality: nothing beyond what particular groups hold to be right exists as a standard.

Mr. Rorty's conception of morality may at first strike readers as strange: an example of Rorty in action in a particular case will help to clarify what he means. In the notorious *Roe v. Wade* (1973) abortion decision, the Supreme Court rightly decided that "the political waters badly needed roiling" (p. 99). Women who wanted to have abortions could not be expected to wait until a consensus developed to support

What is the basis of morality? Given an adequate foundation for morality, can Rorty's call for class war be supported?

them. The Court stepped into the breach and acted.

But you may object, what can Rorty say against those whose preferences differ from his own? Suppose that a group of religious opponents of abortion overturned *Roe v. Wade*. What could Rorty say against them, other than to reiterate his disagreement? Ah, but you see, where religion is concerned, matters are entirely different. In a democracy, "the only test of a political proposal is its ability to gain assent from people who retain radically diverse ideas about the point and

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meaning of human life, about the path of private perfection" (p. 173).

Since some people, our author not least among them, are atheistic, one cannot appeal to religion "as a source of moral knowledge." Religion is a private matter: this is the "Jeffersonian compromise." Nor is this unfair to believers. They are free to derive their premises from a religious source: they are precluded only from appeal to that source in argument, at least so long as skeptics like Rorty are around.

Foolishly, I thought Rorty here open to decisive refutation. If opponents of abortion cannot appeal to religious premises that secularists will reject, then how can Rorty use premises, e.g., the "right to reproductive freedom," that religious believers will reject? If consensus is our goal, are not controversial premises of this type excluded from the dialogue? But I had temporarily forgotten: Rorty sets the rules. From these there is no appeal.

I can at last postpone no longer what to my mind is the key issue for understanding Rorty. Suppose that one accepts his view of morality. What is right is what our Rortyean group deems appropriate. What about the world of fact? Surely this is not determined by consensus of a suitably selected elite.

So far as I can make out, this is exactly what Rorty *does* contend. We should not "think of truth as something towards which we are moving, something we get closer to the more justification we have" (p. 38). Truth is not "out there." It concerns rather the goals we aim to achieve: "the only point in contrasting the true with the merely justified is to contrast a possible future with the actual present" (p. 39, emphasis removed).

On the surface, Rorty's doctrine seems a simple-minded relativism and, as such, open to standard objections. Of this Rorty shows himself well aware: "If we take the distinction between making and finding at face value, our opponents will be able to ask us an awkward question, viz., have we discovered the surprising fact that what was thought to be objective is actually subjective, or have we invented it?" (pp. xxvii–xxviii).

We should not "think of truth as something towards which we are moving, something we get closer to the more justification we have."

Rorty's response to these excellent questions is characteristic. We must "repudiate the vocabulary our opponents use" (p. 39). By refusing to recognize the objective–subjective and absolute–relative polarities, we prevent our Platonist enemies from raising the awkward questions just canvassed. Throughout Rorty's philosophy, a sheer willfulness constantly manifests itself. I should have thought that "triumph of the will" has a resonance that Rorty would not find altogether congenial. ✦

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